



Tips for Tots



Tip #2:

Creative Spaces that Support Social Emotional Competence

Strategies

Did you know?

Most family child care providers work with mixed age groups. This involves creatively managing spaces for a wide variety of children’s interests and abilities. The way your space is arranged will help children know where things belong, where they are allowed and not allowed, and where they can play or learn with items or toys uninterrupted. It is important to consider how your space is arranged. A clearly defined space will allow children to know the areas that are safe and accessible to them at a provider’s home. In order to support children’s social-emotional needs, it is recommended that a variety of areas be available within this space. It is important for mobile infants to have spaces to crawl and explore. Toddlers need spaces to move, use push and pull toys, play with blocks, and climb. Furthermore, all children need to have access to soft, quiet spaces, which will give them the opportunity to be alone or to take some time to calm down and help manage their emotions. A well-organized, developmentally –appropriate space can provide a positive early care and education experience and allow children to be independent.

- To encourage independence & to build a sense of “I am capable” use child-sized furniture or adapt your current furniture.
- Use low shelves or milk crates to store toys/materials to teach independence & responsibility. Label the storage containers with pictures so children will know where items belong.
- Organize materials logically for the children so they are easy to find and are located in areas where they are to be used.
- Display pictures of children with their families at their eye level. Allow photos to be used as a source of comfort for the children. Use photos to identify a child’s personal storage bin.
- Post pictures of children’s art work throughout the space to give them a sense of belonging.
- Small spaces can be used as play areas for one to two children. Mats and bath towels can be used to define workspaces for individual or pairs of children. This can help children to learn to respect play area boundaries.
- Create prop boxes (use shoe boxes or plastic containers) that can be used as portable learning centers. Each box is filled with items around a specific theme. Create themes that focus around children’s lives: caring for babies, adult dress-up clothes, restaurant, doctor’s office, etc.
- Provide daily opportunities for the children to have sensory play experiences. A sensory table could be used or smaller individual bins can be used to store sand, rice, play dough, etc.
- Make a larger, more open space available for a portion of the day for the children to participate in gross motor activities. Incorporate pots, scarves, & hula hoops into their play.
- Have a large pillow or stuffed chair in a quiet corner available to allow children to have space to be alone. Include items in this space such as stress balls, stuffed animals, & feeling books.
- Create a visual schedule of the day and display at children’s eye level. This will help the children learn the order of events that occur each day and know what to expect.
- Rotate toys from time to time and add new things to keep their interest.

Resources:

Creating Rooms of Wonder by Carol Seefeldt, (2002)
Second Home- A Day in the Life of a Model Early Childhood Program by Claire Copenhagen Bainer and Lisa Hale
<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/module1/handout4.pdf>

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